

UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS LOWELL
CENTER FOR LOWELL HISTORY
ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION

SHIFTING GEARS PROJECT
NORTH ADAMS

INFORMANT: JAMES FITZGERALD

INTERVIEWER: ROBERT "GABE" GABRIELSKY

DATE: MARCH 14, 1989

PLACE: WESTERN GATEWAY HERITAGE STATE PARK

J = JAMES

G = GABE

SG-NA-T014

INTERVIEWER: This is Gabe Gabrielsky. We're in my office at the Western Gateway Heritage State Park on March 14, 1989, interviewing James Fitzgerald for the Shifting Gears Oral History Project:

G: Okay. Mr. Fitzgerald, where were you born?

J: Make it Jim.

G: Jim, okay.

J: All right. I was born in Williamstown. Never got very far. It's only five miles from here.

G: Uh, where were, where were your grandparents from?

J: They're, uh, [pauses] my grand (--) My grandfather I guess was from Ireland. He came over when he was real young. I didn't know him, but he came over when he was really young. My father was from Williamstown. My mother was from Williamstown.

G: Did, do you remember your grandparents at all?

J: No, not on my father's side. On my mother's side I did, but I don't remember my father's side.

G: Your grandfather on your mother's side, do you remember what he did for a living?

J: My, on my mother's side he was an architect in Williamstown. And designed, in fact there is still some buildings over there that he has designed.

G: Do you know where he got his education?

J: No I don't. I don't think he had too much formal education. I think he just worked with various [G: Uh huh] architects in those days.

G: Apprentice, yeah.

J: Yeah, yeah.

G: Um. Um, did you ever associate with (--) When you were very young, when you were a very young child, did you ever associate with people older than your parents, like would have been of your grandparents generation?

J: Not really. [Few words unclear]

G: Uh huh, umhm. Okay. Okay, what were your earliest memories? Your own earliest memories?

J: You talking about Sprague, or are you just talking in general right now?

G: Yeah, your personal. What happen to (--)

J: Yeah. Well I guess I was about six years old going to school for the first year. I guess, I guess that's about the most I can remember in those days, or so. [G: Umhm] When it snowed my father would come down in a sleigh and bring me down to school on some of those cold days or so. It was a long time ago.

G: What did your father do for a living?

J: He was a caretaker and superintendent for a large estate in Williamstown.

G: So where did you live? Did you live on the estate there?

J: No, we had a room. [G: No.] We had a room [unclear].

G: Uh huh. Um, did your mother work?

J: No.

G: Uh huh.

J: I shouldn't say that. She, when she was younger she was a, she taught school in, I think it was Cummington for about six months or a year. And she didn't have a formal (--) In those days you didn't have to have a formal (--) She was a high school graduate, but she went over there and taught for about a year when they were in trouble with their teachers. So, so she did teach some

school up there in Cummington.

G: Um, where did you go to school?

J: I graduated from high school in Williamstown. And then they had a Bliss Business College in North Adams. And it's(--) I guess it closed down about 1940 I guess. I went over there for a year and a half.

G: And took a commercial course in this time?

J: Yes, a commercial course, business course.

G: Umhm. Um, would you have (--) You went to Greylock, or was there a different place?

J: No it was the Williamstown High School. [G: Williamstown High School] There wasn't, there wasn't a Greylock in those days. That was built in the last few years.

G: Uh huh.

J: Um, Williamstown High School.

G: Um, what was your first job?

J: Really uh, Sprague Electric really. By the time I got out of Business School and then I just did a little odds and ends around town, but Sprague Electric was really my one and only job.

G: Uh huh. [J: Yeah] When did you start working for Sprague?

J: 1936. [G: Umhm] Before your time.

G: Umhm. Um, what did you do for them when you first started? What was your first job for them?

J: Oh I was a payroll clerk for about a year and a half. And then I went into production, production scheduling. And then I went to the Brown Street plant. I was night superintendent over there for about a year.

G: So you started up at Beaver Street. That was the only plant?

J: In the start of the, I did start up there, yes.

G: Uh huh.

J: And then all of the offices come down to Marshall Street. I believe it was 1952. And uh, but then I went down to what they called the Brown Street Plant. I was there for night superintendent for about a year. And then Neil Welch requested, asked if I'd like to come over

and get in the sales end of in the order department. So I went over there about 1940 I believe it was, 1941.

G: So you were in purchasing your first --

J: No purchasing. No, it's a little scheduling you know, in production. [G: Scheduling?] Production scheduling.

G: What, what did that job entail? What did you actually do? What was the nature of the work itself?

J: We would make our schedules for the production end of it and get all of the materials together to feed the production lines, to make sure they had enough parts to keep going day in and day out.

G: The parts which was like what, plastic, aluminum [few words unclear]?

J: Yeah, you've learned all of the [unclear], yes. [G: wax paper] [Unclear] paper capacitors. I was in the paper capacitor end of it.

G: Wax, a lot of wax you must have ordered, right?

J: Yeah, you're right. [Unclear]

G: Yeah, I used to be in uh, I used to build radios. [J: Oh did you?] As a matter of fact [phone rings] used a lot of Sprague capacitors.

J: Oh you know a little bit, you get the feel of what it's all about.

G: Yeah. Before I did that I used to take radios apart down to (--) So I used to take capacitors apart. So I know what they're in. Uh, filter capacitors too.

Okay, so you would be ordering all of these raw materials, right?

J: That is right.

G: For their (--) Um, (--)

J: Then I went up to sales for a few months. And then I requested that I go to the Brown Street Plant. I don't know why I say Brown Street, if that means anything to do. Then I worked Brown Street for about a year. And then Neal Welch requested that I come back to sales. [G: Umhm] And that was about 1941.

G: You were doing purchasing at Brown Street too?

J: No, not (--) Uh, it wasn't really purchasing, it was material control. [G: Uh huh] Well as a night superintendent I didn't have to, just wandered around to make sure everything was in order

in the night shift on the [G: Uh huh] Brown Street Plant.

G: That was what, like four to twelve?

J: Four till eleven.

G: Uh huh. Um, do you, or did you go to church?

J: Yes I did and I still do.

G: Where?

J: St. Patrick's in Williamstown. [G: Umhm] It's a catholic church.

G: Umhm. Are you married?

J: Yes.

G: Uh, when were you married?

J: 1946.

G: Where is your wife from?

J: She was from, she worked at Sprague Electric, but before she came(--) In fact she was living in North Adams when I met her, but she was from Munroe Bridge, if that means anything to you. Uh,(--)

G: You met her as, but she was (--)

J: But I met her at [unclear] Electric, yes.

G: Um, so you went from Beaver Street to Brown Street and then to Marshall Street? That was your [J: that's right, yeah], that's the way you were moving around? And your job, how did your job change from one location to the other?

J: Well when I got back at Marshall Street, that was under, we'd have about 1450 different customers and you'd break them up from about fourteen different account managers. And then I, I'm trying to think of the years. Then I guess it was about 1946 (--)

G: Oh, so you went into sales then and that's why Marshall Street, uh huh. [J: Yes, that's right. Uh huh. And than [few words unclear] And you already had, they already had these customers. [J: Yes. And then] So you were managing those accounts.

J: Yeah, yeah. And then they decided to give me a title, Assistant, the Corporate Manager Customer Service. And we had fourteen different account managers that covered all of the

accounts in the country. And they would answer to me and I would answer to the president.

G: Uh huh. So you were essentially managing a sales force.

J: That's right. And we'd enter all of the production orders and send them out to various plants around the country.

G: Uh, it had to be a little speculative on your part, because if you hadn't worked in other environments, but do you imagine that selling a product like capacitors would be, is, would be different than say, selling completed radios, or shirts, or (--)

J: Well our gang, we weren't really salesman. We had a group that was out on the road, they had a salesman, but our group [phone rings] was the order entry group [few words unclear] and sales. So we took all of the phones from the customers and they wanted to know when we were going to ship their orders. [Phone rings] And we'd check production and do all sorts of things, and had to call them back. So we were on the phone about six hours I guess, talking to the customers.

G: Umhm, umhm. Uh, but also it's a, it's somewhat, it strikes me as being somewhat different than a uh, that your market is different than if it's a product that, a light bulb or something that somebody can plug in and use.

J: Yeah. Our customers were mainly the people like the Zenith Radios, and the Philco's or the RCAs. All of the radio (--)

G: The big distributors, yeah, yeah.

J: So they would give us the orders and we'd ship them and then they'd make the radios and sent them out to all of their customers.

G: Um, were you ever in (--) When you worked for Sprague were you ever part of a union?

J: Yes. As a matter of fact I was president of the ICW #2. [G: Oh yeah!] You probably know it as ICW #1, but that goes way back.

G: I'll have to dig that out. I'll have to dig that out.

J: I don't know if there's much [few words unclear].

G: I talked to Stackpole as a matter of fact. I interviewed Bill Stackpole.

J: Yeah, well he was a (--) That was (--) He was the production end of it, and ours was really the [unclear] end of things. So its a little, a little different deal. Did you talk to Bill Stackpole? [G: Yeah, yeah] I haven't seen him in a number, long time. And [rest of comment unclear].

G: Yeah, that was a very rewarding [unclear].

J: I bet it was too, because he's got a lot of anecdotes [unclear]. But then I was in the [G: office] union when I was in you know, for them. I guess that was about 1939 I guess, I was in the union for a couple of years. And I was president. We had, we never had too many serious labor problems. Everything went along all right. [G: Uh huh] But then they put me on salary. So then when I went into sales, so that was the end of the union. [G: Uh huh]

G: Um, did you develop a lot of friendships on the, on the job? [J: yes] Uh, do you think that, that most of your close friendships through the years have been from, from the job or from elsewhere, from other activities, or?

J: Well I guess maybe 50/50, [G: uh huh] because I have a lot of close friends at Sprague, which I still do. I've been out since 1984, but uh, and I still have a lot of friends in Williamstown that didn't work at Sprague's. So I would say about 50/50.

G: Um, how about your relationships with um, with the uh Sprague management. Would those (--) For example: who did you report to? Who was over you?

J: When I first went up to sales I reported to Neil Welch. He was the president. And then later on they made him chairman of the board. And then I reported to Carol Killam.

G: Wasn't uh, wasn't Robert Sprague, Sr., wasn't he chairman of the board, or [unclear].

J: He was at one time, but then he relinquished the duties and Neil Welch had the thing. [G: Uh huh, uh huh] Yeah.

G: Um, and uh, what, through the years what was your relationship with bosses with management at Sprague?

J: I got along very well with them. [G: Uh huh] Never had any problems at all [unclear]

G: How about with those people that you supervised?

J: We never had any problem. We did have little labor problems. In fact if I can remember when Neil Welch was president or so, we'd have a little just, nothing very serious, but people come in and we'd work out the problems. Then Neil Welch would say, "did you take care of it?" I'd say, "yeah, everything is all resolved." "I don't care if it's resolved, are the people happy?" He was always very concerned about the people. "Are you sure?" "Neil I did it, no problem at all." "Are you sure?" He always wanted to make sure all of the people were taken care of and they were very friendly. He's a good, he's a nice guy to work for. In fact he still lives in Williamstown. He's eighty years old.

G: Uh huh. So, so what you (--) You were uh, if there were grievances or labor disputes you were in a position where you had to resolved them with people?

J: Yup, yup, definitely. When the union would come up and we'd sit down and talk to the

people and find out.

G: You were, you were on the management team [J: yeah] for negotiating and that sort of thing? [J: Yeah, yeah, exactly]

J: But we never, we always seemed to be able to resolved them all right with the union. We never had too many serious problems we had to worry about.

G: Uh, how about(--) Um, I'm looking for other things that this would come up a lot in terms of people who did production work. Often people who don't do production work don't think about it. But uh, I'm not talking so much about relationship with your fellow workers, or your bosses, but with other working conditions and that sort of thing, what were they like? I mean what sort of, what kind of office did you work in? What was that like?

J: Well I had my own office and my secretary, and a secretary. [G: Uh huh] And like all of the different account managers in the office would have their own, either one or two girls. And I had a group of about sixty people I guess all together with the account managers and girls. And the order, and order [coughs](--) We used to enter the orders there, and the order entry clerks which is a group of about sixty. Then over here(--)

G: Where was this? That was (--)

J: This was in Marshall Street. But then in (--)

G: But that was a different room from your office then? Right.

J: Oh yes. I mean it was a large area, a large [unclear].

G: Uh huh. It was like a typing pool, or something like that?

J: Yes.

G: Umhm. And that was immediately like outside your office, this (--)

J: Well it was in the same area. Yes, outside my office, yes.

G: I see. I see, uh huh. Uh, what did? Uh, what did you like to do off the job when you weren't at work? What was your pastimes?

J: Did a lot of skiing. [G: Uh huh] Haven't done much this winter. Still ski a little bit, but not that much.

G: [Few words unclear]. What's there to(--) I mean you've got to, if you don't have a snow machine there's nothing out there, right?

J: I play a lot of golf. In fact the golf season will be opening up pretty soon, so [unclear] to play

golf.

G: Yeah, oh it's beautiful. Today, yeah, it feels like we're ready for it, huh? Uh, did you uh, belong to any clubs, organizations, associations, civic groups, political groups, anything like that?

J: Not really, no.

G: Did you do (--) Besides uh, going to church regularly, did you do any other activities at your church?

J: Yeah, over the years there'd be various groups, we'd get together. The Holy Name, Holy Name [G: uh huh] in the church, that was gee, a long time ago, yeah.

G: Um, would you have any sort of memorabilia like this?

J: I, I'll look around, if I do I'll be glad to bring it in.

G: I would very much appreciate anything like that. If you'd like to take a, if you'd like to take a look you know, through this [J: sure, I'd be glad to] photographs, um, (--) Um, I have a couple of sort of controversial questions here. Um, how do you feel about Sprague pulling out of Marshall Street? What do you think of that?

J: I got out in December of '84 and they started pulling out about I guess it was '83 or so. [G: right] But uh, I guess it was between Penn Central and their top executives. I guess from a money point of view they figured that was the best way to go financially. And they're closer to that than I am. And I guess I can't argue with the decision. I hate to see a lot of the people lose their job here at the time, but uh, that was the decision of the top management with Penn Central.

G: Not a lot you can do about it.

J: Yeah, that's right.

G: Um, okay. How do you feel about MoCA?

J: I think it's (--) In the beginning I was worrying it's going to go over, but every week or so you hear a little bit more. I really think it's going to [G: Uh huh] uh, take off I guess.

G: Uh huh. [J: Yeah] Do you think, do you think that would be a good thing for the community?

J: Yeah, I sure do, yeah. [G: Uh huh] It's going to be a big deal. It's going to be a lot bigger than I realized. So.

G: Did you go to the ball?

J: I didn't, no.

G: If it was possible for me to take a group of retirees on a tour of Marshall Street, would you be willing to do that with me?

J: Sure.

G: Well I would like to video, do a tour of the building and video tape it, [J: Yeah] you know, with maybe a dozen people or so.

J: Of course you probably should get some, maybe you should get some production people, because I was, I'd been down there but I couldn't say this was that and the other thing as close as some of the other people over there.

G: That was all part of it. The offices were part of it too. [J: Well yeah, but that (--)] The production people never got any offices either. Works both ways, right?

J: Well yeah. But well, in some ways. [Unclear] Neal Welch, I don't know if you heard name bandied around or so, [G: yeah] but he'd always have the door opened. Anybody from production, or anybody who had to come up and argue would knock. I shouldn't say argue, come up for advice. Sit down, what's your problem and he'd talk for about an hour. And uh, he always wanted to make sure that people were taken care of. A very good, he's always looked up for the community. He's was a local boy, and everybody in North Adams liked Neal.

G: Uh huh. Um, I'll tell you the kind of people who I have interviewed for this job. I've interviewed a lot of production people, I've interviewed several union people. Bass, Bolger, Wood and Bob Diodati. Bob Diodati gave me your name.

J: In fact I saw Bob. We had a basketball banquet last night. I saw Bob. "Hey, I'm going over to see your man tomorrow." "Oh Gabe?" I said, "yeah!" "Oh good, he says, good!"

G: Yeah, Bob has been very helpful.

J: Yeah, he did good. He was very capable. [G: Yes] He was very capable. He helped put a lot of the contracts together between union an management. [G: Uh huh] But uh, first he was in (--) You probably know more about it than I do. He was with the union at one time and they all respected him. So then he got in management. He could talk both sides of it. He was very capable of putting various contracts together for the last three years.

G: Um, so as I said, I've talked to production people, I've talked to union people, I've talked to several people, not enough, but several people who worked there when it was Arnold Print Works. Uh, and um, but probably you know, the group of people that I haven't talked enough to, I've asked around and stuff like that, but haven't been able to find people. I'm interested in foremen and managers, and top managers, engineers. That's a group, that's a group of people aside from maybe yourself and Bob, that I really, that's a whole group of people I haven't talk too much/

J: There was a production manager that worked there for fifty years. Maybe you've interviewed him. Um, Bill Pierce? Or John Pierce, John Pierce.

G: I talked to him and he's, he wouldn't talk to me [unclear]. [J: Oh really?] Yeah, apparently his wife is ill, or something.

J: That's right. She's had a stroke and he can't get out and she can't even talk. Yeah.

G: Yeah, that's what he said. That he-- [J: Yeah, he] I volunteered to go over his house. He said no, she'd get too upset [J: Yeah], you know, so uh [unclear].

J: He'd have a lot of background, because he goes back for fifty years [G: yeah] and very well thought of [unclear].

G: Yeah, that's unfortunate. I mean I've had a couple of situations like that. For you know, for awhile Wood wouldn't talk to me. And then Bob talked to him and he came and (--)

J: [Laughs] Yeah, Bob was good at putting things together.

G: Yeah, yeah. So, but if there are other people, I mean in any, who worked, I'm especially interested in people who worked at Marshall Street. What I want to do is (--) The nature of my project, I'm focusing very much on how the structure of work changed at Marshall Street. That's why I have these pictures of Arnold Print Works. I mean I did, I want to have comparisons of machinery and how the machinery changed from one to the other. I'm also going to start uh, start interviewing people um, from MoCA in terms of what they're going to build. Just kind of a whole sort of continuity from Arnold Print Works, to Sprague, to MoCA about uh (--)

J: On that was in charge of mechanical engineering at Sprague, was very capable, was Walter Schroeder.

G: Walter Schroeder? [J: Yeah] Is he around?

J: He lives in Williamstown. He retired about a year or two ago, but he's doing a little consulting work here in North Adams right now for a couple of people, but he's very knowledgeable on all mechanical end of [unclear]. [G: Uh huh, uh huh] And I would think that he would be glad to help you out on the thing. [G: comment unclear]. Uh, Walter Schroeder.

G: Um, the subtitle of my project is called "The Changing Meaning of Work in Massachusetts", or we can be more specific and talk about the changing meaning of work in North Adams since the 1920's. And really in all of the interviews I'm doing um, that's what, that's what we're looking for. We're looking for an answer for that question. How has the meaning of work changed in North Adams since the 1920's. And um, I pose this to everyone I interview. What do you think? How has the meaning of work changed in North Adams since the 1920's? Often people just throw it back in my face and say well, what do you mean the meaning of work? [Laughs] At which point I just throw it back at them and I say, I'm not sure what I mean. That's

the uh, that's the title of our project here. So presumably we're looking for something. What do you think? What does it sound like, you know? Um, a lot of (--) I teach college when I, or when I'm not doing things like this. And I like to ask students questions like that, questions that I don't have the answer to. And it always annoys them, because they think that professors are suppose to have the answers to questions, you know? If you don't (--) You know, don't ask me a question you don't know the answer to. You know, those are the most interesting questions. And uh, so I'm being a little windy here, but basically I want to ask you, think about your life and your work here in North Adams. And, and uh, even in your own life time, with the kind of responsibilities you had at work in your own life time how has work changed since the 1920's?

J: [Unclear] I only can talk about 1936 on, because that's the only thing [few words unclear].

G: Well that's fine, from the 1930's then.

J: In those days we were all up at the Beaver Street Plant. I'm guessing I would say about 400 people. And I guess maybe forty cents an hour was the rate. That sounds awful low to you right now. [Laughs] And to think of the minimum rate of \$3.75.

G: Yeah, but bread was ten cents a loaf too. [J: What's that?] Bread was ten cents a loaf.

J: That's right. You know we got around fifteen dollars a week or so. We thought it was great. We'd go bowling, do all sorts of things. Uh, we could talk about that a little.

G: So, so money has changed the [unclear].

J: It's changed it considerably, you know. Yeah, about forty cents an hour until now.

G: How about the nature of work? I mean the kind of (--) Even things that you did, did that change at all?

J: Yeah, it's a way we (--) You know, in the old days they just typed the orders out and put them in an envelope and mail them out to various plants around the country. But then, oh twenty-five years ago, with all of the computers now we just enter the information and they send it down the wire and be down to [unclear].

G: FAX it out or they'd write on the wire, right.

J: It would be right down there the following morning at 8:30 or so. They really cut down on time [unclear].

G: If you were in sales, did the technology, or the telephone, or the use of the telephone change at all? You said you'd be on the telephone six hours a day. How about long distance calling? Was that, did that change, or uh?

J: Well in the beginning we just had one phone and one line on the thing. But then I don't know, twenty-five years ago with all the buttons we could hold this one and talk to production, then get

conference calls. And so we thought we were real sophisticated along the way, which isn't really, because everybody has it today. [G: Right] But we came a long way from just having one line to the customer. And then if you wanted to check something we'd have to go over and grab another phone if you wanted to call production. But now with all of their buttons today we're real sophisticated.

G: Right. [J: Yeah] Yeah.

J: Gee you forget that. But we didn't have too many. Yeah, I think we had about two phones in the sales office and about two or three people. It kept building up over the years.

G: Um, what's the most memorable thing that ever happened to you at Sprague? Well you don't have to limit it to one story.

J: Gee I can remember, this must be about(--) I might be off on the year, but in 19, say in 1940 one of our customers which turned out to be a very good customer was Polaroid Camera, which as you know, they could make or break Sprague right now. But I remember we didn't know who Polaroid Camera was, but they needed some capacitors and they came up to talk to our (--) In fact they wanted to get a good credit reference, because they weren't the best in the world on credit, because they just started. And they came up and they went to the gatehouse, and they had a Polaroid Camera. We didn't even know what a Polaroid Camera was at that time. And they took a picture of the guard in I don't know, about a minute or so. [G: Right] He said, "will you bring that up to your treasurer?" He said, "we'd like to have him see it." Gee, the guard [laughing] couldn't get over that he got a picture in a minute or so. Needless to say our treasurer registered unlimited credit, which is a good thing because Polaroid as you know, [G: right] they could make or break Sprague right now or so. I could always remember that. The guard called, "that man was in there, he says, with the camera. He says, for thirty seconds he showed me my picture." The guard, and a man from Polaroid said, "would you bring this up to your treasurer." [Laughing] The treasurer looked at it and he called it right off and they resolved their credit problems [few words unclear].

G: That's interesting. [J: Comment unclear] Um (--)

J: You've been through probably the strike with different people or so in [unclear].

G: Yeah. Well what was your (--) I mean my perception, the reason I didn't ask you about that is that it seemed like uh, you were kind of uh, didn't have a lot to do with it. But I mean, what was your perception of that situation?

J: Well we had a skeleton crew. Well in the 1970 we had a skeleton crew in there. [G: Uh huh] So, and uh, not everybody crossed the picket line. Some people, we'd come in and we'd get the orders entered the best we could, but we kept going. But it did hurt business because it doesn't take long when the customers find out that you're on strike that they're not going to get their product when they think they're going to get it. We just told them it was only, the strike was only in North Adams. That we had different plants around the country and they weren't affected, but it still hurts a little bit. All they think of Sprague Electric it's on strike and it's all over the

country, which it wasn't. And that lasted I guess for about ten weeks. [G: Umhm]

G: How about um, social relations as a result of the strike? I mean you described people as getting along quite well and everything, but a strike can be a pretty stressful experience for people.

J: It did, but thank goodness that nature takes care of everything. Well before the strike, on the social end of it, oh god the, they were always having parties.

G: Yeah, yeah, the company was always [unclear].

J: They're good on that. About every other month they'd have a party and uh, everybody would go [phone rings]. In fact I remember once it was, then they got what they called a management club. It wasn't really management as such. It meant if you didn't punch a time clock you could join the management club. And they'd have meetings every, I think we paid \$6.00 a year, but then the company would buy the meal for everybody and they'd have a public speaker.

G: Where was that?

J: They'd have different places. Down at the, different places. [Unclear], different places around or so. So we'd all go have a meal and they were about every two months. As a matter of fact, at one time uh, the company brought us all down to Pittsfield to the Pittsfield Country Club. And they got a band from Boston. They did it up right. See Mr. Sprague always wanted to have good relationship with the, with the help. [G: Umhm, umhm] He was very, very concerned about that.

G: So, so you think that, that everything, after this strike everything was uh, [J: in time, yeah] resolved. [J: Yes] Uh huh.

J: There's always one or two that still remember the strike from way back or so, but I think generally speaking [G: uh huh] the people got over it.

G: Um, is there anything that uh, that you think I missed in terms of (--) I mean I'm glad that you brought up the strike. Uh, is there anything that you think I've missed in terms of talking about your uh, experiences at Sprague that you would like to talk about?

J: I guess you want to know how the relationship [coughs] with the Sprague. And I remember in the old days, well even in the 1970's Mr. Sprague would still come around to the office and, our offices and everything and go in a shake hands with everybody in the office. He wanted to make sure that everything was all right. And he'd even go down to the production areas and talk with everybody in the 1970's. In the 1980's he was getting older and he didn't do too much of that, but even in the 70's he'd go around and shake hands with everybody every Christmas and talk to everybody. [Unclear].

G: Is there anybody from that old, from that era, from the era of old Dorsey Sprague, who's, who's besides yourself that you can think of who would be around to talk to?

J: Paul Fern.

G: Paul Fern.

J: Yeah, in fact he worked in the office with me and I think he's retired like I am and he's living in North Adams. [G: Uh huh] He's probably have a lot of good stories to tell. [G: Uh huh] That's [spells] F-E-R-N, Fern.

G: Sure, I'll look him up. Um, okay. Well I don't really have anything else to say, unless you have, anything else to ask you unless [rest of comment unclear].

J: And then the company was always good. And then they had the bowling leagues and the, and the softball games.

G: Did you do, did you participate in those kinds of activities?

J: I didn't participate too much in that. I played more golf and tennis and [unclear].

G: I've got one to ask you that just came up today and I haven't seen it anywhere. I'm glad that you raise this thing about the uh, (--) I got pictures of the baseball teams here and stuff like that. And everybody talked about them and the dinners and stuff. But what did I see in Sprague Logues and no one has talked about this? An orchestra! Do you remember anything about this? A Sprague orchestra?

J: No, no I can't.

G: [Laughs] Well I'm just uh (--)

J: They'd have various dances, they'd be a lot of local people dancing.

G: No, this is like a symphony orchestra with a violin section.

J: No. At Sprague, no.

G: Yes.

J: You could be right, but (--)

G: I've got pictures in the Sprague Logue of the conductor and their string section. It says the Sprague Orchestra.

J: Boy I am slipping [unclear]. No I can't.

G: Uh huh. Hey, I'll have to do some more research on that.

J: That's interesting.

G: I have a stack of Sprague Logues here.

J: Do you have any Sprague Logues?

J: Yes, I think there are some, yeah.

G: You do?

J: Yeah. I don't, I can't remember any orchestra. They had the Berkshire Symphony in Williamstown that some Sprague people belonged to, but that was a Berkshire deal. It wasn't just Sprague. As a matter of fact we had Minstrels, 1939 or 1940.

G: Yeah, this was(--) The footnote on, the footnote on this (--) This is late 40's. This is either World War II, or late 40's. And the footnote on it is that it's the, it's the Sprague Orchestra.

J: God I should know too, because I was there in those days. But uh, no, I can't help. [G: no?] But as I started to say in the (--) Then they had the softball and the baseball, and the bowling. And then the company would give all of the prizes at the end and then have a banquet. And they'd pick up the tab. They were always very good as far as, they were always a very company minded as far as picking up the tab on all of the [G: Uh huh] things. Very good.

G: Christmas. What was uh (--)

J: Then we'd have a clambake every year. [Comment unclear]

G: Production workers talked about Christmas parties in the production departments. [J: Chuckles] Basically the afternoon on Christmas Eve (--)

J: They cut that, unfortunately they cut that out over, in later years because of the (--) Yeah.

G: They would use the ovens of the, to bake in and stuff like that. The ovens that they used to [unclear].

J: And they used to bring in liquor. And it wasn't too good I guess, but then over the years I guess some of the people didn't get home on time. The company finally said, "hey". So they let the people go home at noon so there couldn't be any problems the day before Christmas or so. Of course in those days everybody was younger and they were all a little bit wilder [rest of comment not too clear].

G: Uh, were there office parties like this for Christmas time?

J: Yes, yes. Yeah.

G: Um, uh, were uh, (--) One of the things that is, there was uh, in production there was a

disproportionate number of women who worked in production. I know that most (--) That there were more women in production.

J: Yes, that's right, than men in the production end of it. Yeah.

G: Uh huh. Uh, and there's, there were um, were there a lot of men in the office, or was it evenly divided between men and women? Or how was that?

J: No, I think there was women as well. There was twice as many women as men, [G: in the office] because lots of the men would have two girls to work for them. [G: Uh huh] And most of the girls would do the typing or so.

G: So you had what, essentially two secretaries? Or they were typists, or?

J: Yes.

G: Uh huh. Did they had other secretarial duties besides typing, or?

J: Well they would, they would also call the customers back, or check production. They were to be sort of like an assistant to [unclear] account managers. [G: Uh huh, uh huh] And uh, they were sort of jack of all trades, they could do most anything.

G: Yeah, yeah. Uh, okay. Well I uh, (--) I'll uh, I feel like I asked you about everything that I wanted to ask.

J: There was one good article in the paper, in the Berkshire Eagle about a year an a half ago. Lou Kyler, do you know Lou Kyler? [G: Uh, know of him, yes]. It's the Berkshire Eagle. All right. He's down at Pitts (--) He put a good article in the paper on [G: on Sprague?] on Sprague, yeah. That you might want to (--)

G: I'll take a look.

J: That goes back for about a year, a year and a half I guess.

G: It was like an historical overview, or? [J: yes] I think that'd be real important. Uh, thanks a lot for your time.

J: You're very welcome. Glad to help out.

TAPE IS TURNED OFF THEN TURNED ON AGAIN WITH JAMES IN MID SENTENCE:

J: Jeese, I can't remember dates. I guess it was about the 1970's.

G: From the time you came in you had a good insurance plan? This was like when you were, when you were first on?

J: Well not when I first started in '36. I mean over the years that they then added the hospitalization plan and then the 1970's I guess it was, then they had the dental plan. They had a very good medical plan for all of the Sprague people. Very good. Very good.

G: Uh huh. This was for management, or for everybody?

J: No, everybody. You didn't have to be just (--) Yeah.

G: Uh huh.

J: Uh, Mr. Sprague really, he really was conscious of all the people. He had a good heart.

G: Uh huh.

J: For a gentleman who isn't too well right now he's, [G: yeah] he's eighty-nine right now, but he's still keen, but he can't get around too well I guess.

G: Uh huh. I think, I would love the opportunity to interview him, but I think he's probably too infirm.

J: I don't know. I'm not going to say he would or he (--) I don't know.

G: Yeah. I know it's hard. I know other people have tried and haven't been able to. [J: Yeah] So I don't know what the reasons are, [J: yeah] but uh there have, yeah, there haven't, hasn't been able to, anybody (--) About two or three people I know have tried to interview with him [J: unclear]. So. Why did you want to bring up the insurance plan?

J: No, I just (--) Over the years or so the company brought up the, had a good insurance plan and then they had the dental plan. Just trying to say what the company did [G: yeah] for the various people. [G: Uh huh, uh huh] It was very [unclear].

G: Uh huh. Okay. Well thanks a lot.

J: Glad to help out or so.

tape ends.